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To: The Faithful of the Diocese of London

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A month ago when we began our Lenten journey, we could hardly have imagined how that spiritual journey would be drastically altered by the onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic. We expected to enter the desert of our familiar Lenten practices of abstaining from certain foods or pleasures and striving to be more considerate to each other and conscious of the needs of the poor. Instead, we have suddenly entered an unknown new desert filled with fear, sickness and even the spectre of death.

Yet, these unexpected and confusing circumstances do not nullify our customary Lenten practices. We are still called to fasting, but from that which is most dear to us, namely, the Eucharist, the sacraments and the solace of gathering as a community of believers to celebrate them. This fast, this absence, has made us appreciate even more how precious they are to us.

The fruit of fasting is to make us aware of our hunger for God and to lead us, as we draw closer to our loving God, to works of justice and the care of others. Now, in this moment, our fasting from that which nourishes us is for the sake of service to the common good of our wider community. And our prayer, which is the hallmark of our Lenten repentance, is not simply for ourselves and our deepening in our baptismal commitment but also for the sick, those who are courageously caring for them and our public leaders who must guide our nation through this crisis.

In our new Lenten journey, one thing remains the same. Lent is intended to be a sacred time when we discover anew who we are in Christ and recommit ourselves to our consecration in him. As Jesus came to understand in his forty days in the desert, he was the beloved Son of the Father designated to proclaim the kingdom of God. The desert in which we now find ourselves is not only a place of anxiety and darkness but also a means for us to realize anew that we, too, are the beloved sons and daughters of God and as such sent out as missionary disciples of Jesus to proclaim the Gospel to a world desperately in need of it.

But we are certain of God's choice of us as his own and as such, like St. Paul, we can say:

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? [...] Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [...] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-32; 35; 37-39).

At this difficult time, I am holding all of you in my heart and prayers, longing with you for that day when we can gather together again in our churches to sing the praise of our God!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London

Diocese of London: Being a mission-oriented Church that forms disciples of Jesus